

PUAIOHI or SMALL KAUA‘I THRUSH

(*Myadestes palmeri*)

Little is known about the rare and endangered Puaiohi. This small secretive thrush dwells along fern covered stream banks in remote, high elevation ‘Ōhi‘a forests on the island of Kaua‘i.

DISTRIBUTION: Puaiohi are found only in the Alaka‘i Swamp of Kaua‘i.

DESCRIPTION: Seven inches in length, Puaiohi are dark brown above and gray below with a whitish abdomen. They have a white eye ring, a dark slender bill, and flesh colored legs. Sexes are similar. Juveniles’ breasts are speckled with dark brown.

VOICE: The song of the Puaiohi has been compared to a “squeaking of a metal wheel in need of lubrication” and a “simple trill.” Its call is short and jay-like.

NESTING: Two Puaiohi nests of woven mosses, ferns, and grasses have recently been discovered. They were found on moss ledges in protective cavities adjacent to streams.

DIET: The purple berries of ‘ōlapa make up a substantial part of the diet of the Puaiohi. Spiders and caterpillars found in the understory of the rainforest provide food as well.

CONSERVATION NOTE: Puaiohi frequent the small trees and shrubs in the understory of ‘ōhi‘a forests. Though never considered very numerous, the population of the Puaiohi has steadily declined, and during the 1970s may have experienced a tenfold drop in numbers.

As with other endangered native passerines, the Puaiohi’s drop in population is attributed to disruption of the forest ecosystem they inhabit. The extent to which introduced plants, animals and avian diseases have impacted on the Puaiohi is unknown. However, the combination of these disturbances and others, such as predation by rats, pose real threats to their survival.

No more than 300 Puaiohi are believed to inhabit the ‘ōhi‘a forests of the Alaka‘i Swamp. The essential habitat for endangered forest birds in the Alaka‘i covers 19,500 acres, most of which is controlled by the Division of Forestry and Wildlife as the Alaka‘i Wilderness Preserve.

This wet high plateau is also home to the five other endangered forest birds of Kaua‘i. The preservation and management of what remains of their native forest habitat is vital if this rich and colorful part of Hawai‘i’s natural heritage is to endure.



— U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service